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ABSTRACT

As a student teacher who had just finished her teaching assignment at Old Dominion Middle School in central Virginia, the author was struck by differences in students' classroom and hallway behavior. Whereas students were calm and respectful inside classrooms, they pushed, cursed, and ran in hallways while teachers looked on. Wondering why teachers did not intervene to stop misbehavior that was clearly against school rules, she decided to conduct survey research. Teachers completed a survey that asked how long they had been teaching and how often they intervene in seven kinds of hallway misconduct: name-calling, pushing, cursing, fighting, play-fighting, running, and verbal threats. Results showed a slight correlation between newer teachers and less frequent intervention. In explaining why they sometimes do not correct misbehavior, teachers named factors such as being too busy, not knowing misbehaving students, viewing misconduct as typical of middle-schoolers, and having lack of support from administrators and other teachers. Overall, teachers were displeased with current hallway behavior and desired more consistency in hallway policy. The first step would be to agree on a common standard. (MLH)

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# Frequency of Teacher Intervention in Hallway Misconduct

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## Abstract:

At Old Dominion Middle School, I was struck by the difference in students' classroom and hallway behavior. Whereas students were calm and respectful in classrooms, they pushed, cursed, and ran in the hallways while teachers looked on. I wondered why teachers did not intervene to stop misbehavior that was clearly against school rules, so I conducted survey research. Teachers completed a survey asking how long they have been teaching and how often they intervene in seven kinds of hallway misconduct: name-calling, pushing, cursing, fighting, play-fighting, running, and verbal threats. Results showed a slight correlation between newer teachers and less frequent intervention. In explaining why they sometimes do not correct misbehavior, teachers named factors such as too busy, not knowing students involved in misbehavior, and lack of support from administration and other teachers. Overall, teachers were displeased with current hallway behavior and would like more consistency in hallway policy.

# Introduction

When I finished my student teaching in the fall of 1997 at Old Dominion Middle School in central Virginia, I left wondering why teachers allowed students so much freedom to misbehave in the hallway. In the classrooms, teachers were firmly in charge; students knew the rules and knew that breaking them would bring consequences. The hallways were another story entirely. My first week at ODMS, I felt ill at ease as I heard muttered curse words, saw a lot of playful but rough physical contact between students, and watched students running and jumping to touch the ceiling. Sometimes teachers reprimanded students, but often the behavior was let go. By the end of my eight week teaching experience, I was also able to ignore the rather wild atmosphere, only getting involved when it seemed a fight might break out.

I still never felt comfortable with my role in the hall; if I heard a student curse, what should I do? Say, "Watch your language?" Give them a look? Let it go? I realized that the teacher's role in the hall was unclear to me. Yes, during class changes, we stood alertly at our classroom doors, but what were we looking for, and what behavior were we supposed to stop?

Another element to class changes is that twice during the day, students must go outdoors to change classes. Since sections of the school are separate, and students must walk outside to get to these buildings, twice during the day teachers had leave their rooms to walk the students outside. This duty was especially important, one teacher told me, because those times are when most fights occur, since sometimes not all of the teachers go outside. Our presence was supposed to dissuade these fights, and for the most part it

did; I saw few fights at the school. However, that did not mean there were not many other kinds of misbehavior during class changes. Students cursed, pushed, and ran during class changes while teachers looked for possible fights.

At the middle school, there is always at least one security guard on duty. The guards are mainly to monitor the outside areas, such as the front doors, to keep out non-students. They also make sure students do not leave, and keep an eye out for truants. The guards sometimes walk in the hallways when classes are in session, but do not appear during class changes. It seems that between classes, teachers are the ones who should be in charge in the hallways

The hallway misbehavior at Old Dominion Middle School surprised me because it differed so greatly from the classrooms, where teachers had excellent control and high standards for acceptable behavior. The teachers were not oblivious of the dichotomy between hall and class behavior standards; I often sensed frustration about student behavior and confusion about when to intervene, but no one discussed it or looked for solutions. Now that I have finished teaching at the school, I would like to go back and address the issue.

Teaching is an art comprised of an extremely broad range of duties. Teachers are instructors, social workers, friends, mentors, crowd controllers, and yes, hallway monitors. Part of teaching's challenge is balancing all of these duties. In the case of my middle school, the balancing act involved less emphasis on hallway control, but not without frustration. In examining how teachers at one middle school have chosen to balance their duties and why, I hope to gain insight on the balancing act that teachers must do.

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that contribute to a lack of consistent intervention in student hallway misconduct. A survey asked teachers to note how long they had been teaching, then state if they always, sometimes, or never intervened in seven common hallway misbehaviors: name-calling, pushing, cursing, fighting, play-fighting, running, and verbal threats. Also, teachers answered short questions describing why they sometimes intervene and sometimes overlook misconduct. From this, I determined whether or not newer teachers intervene less often, and what other factors besides number of years teaching affect whether or not teachers intervene in hallway misconduct.

I expected to find that teachers did not always intervene to stop misconduct that is clearly against school rules. I also expected a lack of consensus on what behaviors to intervene on and how often. I predicted that newer teachers would intervene less, perhaps because they are still so busy getting down the basics, or that newer teachers would intervene more because they are still idealistic and try to do everything. I expected teachers to express frustration with lack of clarity on the teacher's role during class changes. Factors I predicted teachers would name were lack of overall administrative support and lack of time to do all of the duties that are required to make class changes go smoothly.

This thesis begins with a review of relevant literature on the subject of hallway management and consistency in discipline. I then detail the design of my study, and analyze my results. I conclude by recommending ways to address the issue of teacher intervention in hallway misbehavior.

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## Literature Review

Nothing in mentioned specifically in the literature about handling hallway behavior. There are numerous books, however, that address administration and the need for consistent standards for effective school wide discipline.

The book *Respect and Protect: A Practical, Step-by-Step Violence Prevention and Intervention Program for Schools and Communities* by Carole Remboldt and Richard Zimman (1996) suggests that allowing misbehavior to continue is part of the reason it occurs. Authors Remboldt and Zimman describe the "enabling system" that occurs when teachers allow student misbehavior to continue:

> By tolerating violence, we're telling students who feel entitled to be violent that we agree with them. Their attitude of entitlement, and out attitude of tolerance toward it, are part of the enabling system" (46).

When teachers allow students to continue a behavior, they are tacitly approving it. For my research, this is important because it describes the unintentional damage that teachers might do by not intervening. The term "violence" here is a bit strong for some of the behaviors I look at in my survey research, although fighting and pushing are undeniably violent. The system of enabling applies to all behavior, not just violent ones; if a teacher sees a student curse and does not intervene, the teacher is giving that student permission to curse, and the behavior will not be likely to stop. The authors do note that it is a system, not the fault of a single person.

Remboldt and Zimman list behaviors of teachers and administrators that "enable" students to misbehave:

- Failing to set clear, consistent standards of classroom conduct

- Purposely avoiding areas of the building or grounds where students are known to act aggressively
- Not intervening when a student commits a violent act of threatens to do so
- Not reporting violence and verbal threats of aggression
- Not reporting rumors of planned fights on or off the school grounds
- Pretending not to notice threats and acting out in the classroom and hallways
- Failing to report complaints from victims of aggression (55)

I did see some of these behaviors at Old Dominion. "Not intervening when a student commits a violent act of threatens to do so" is one that most applies to this study, but I witnessed all of these behaviors during my student teaching. This list sets a high standard for a teacher who is very, very, busy and frequently hears students make verbal threats in the heat of the moment. However, setting a high standard cannot be a bad thing.

The book *Maximum Security: The Culture of Violence in Inner City Schools* by John Devine (1996) focuses on the hallways of the lowest tier of New York City Public Schools. Devine's book is based on the fact that he believes that the atmosphere of a school's hallways sets as important a tone for students as do the classrooms. He believes that hallways represent the public sphere, where teachers are less in control and where street culture is the norm. In New York City Public Schools, teachers have given up the hallways to armed security guards. This represents the way the street culture invades the school. Teachers abandoning the halls means they only focus on the academic, not discipline. This doesn't sound too horrilble, but Devine believes this is an unnatural division. How can you educate someone if you ignore everything but their mind as it operates in the classroom? Teachers should know about their student's lives outside of class, since it undoubtedly affects how they act in class. I believe this is relevant to my research in that it represents a situation that is not occurring at Old Dominion Middle

School. The security guards do not patrol the hallways, and the teachers still feel it is their responsibility.

In *Rethinking Student Discipline*, authors Paula Short, Rick Short, and Charlie Blanton provide valuable insight into planning school policies on behavior. The authors list questions that can indicate a school's disciplinary climate, such as, "How committed is the staff to discipline outside the classroom?" and "Are policies and approaches to dealing with discipline problems consistent" (12)? The staff's commitment to discipline outside the classroom is exactly the attitude I wanted to study, and I suspected that there were frustrations with lack of consistent policy. The authors also note, "Duties that many teachers consider peripheral are critical in establishing good control and order in the schools" (12). Although they do not say specifically, I believe that this includes monitoring hallways during class changes. The authors emphasize "faculty and student ownership of both the problem and the program," which means involving as many staff members and students as possible in school-wide discipline systems (17).

The authors list attitudes that may hinder school wide discipline:

- The "He's Not My Student" Syndrome or the teacher who ignores misbehavior of students
- The "I'll Keep a Low Profile" Syndrome or the teacher who is present in body but not in mind
- The "It's None of My Business" Syndrome or the teacher who tries to become an ally of the student by subtly telling the student, "I'll stick to my business, you stick to yours" (12)

I expected to find these three attitudes in surveying teachers because they are possible reasons a teacher might not intervene to stop student misbehavior. First, if a teacher does not know a student, they may let the behavior go. Second, a low profile teacher might

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not want conflict that comes from intervention. Finally, a teacher may stay out of student's "business" in exchange for the student not interfering with class.

Short, Short and Blanton state that these attitudes make for a staff who will not stand behind a discipline policy, because teacher attitudes may be at odds with the policy that asks them to stop behaviors that they do not feel are serious enough to bother with. This, in turn, may prevent school-wide discipline standards. Not only will teachers attitudes be at odds with the stated rules of the school, but possibly at odds with each other. The authors note that teachers often have differing attitudes about intervening: "At any school, a range of discipline beliefs among teachers is likely to exist. Without awareness and accommodation of these belief differences, discipline planners risk ineffective or incomplete implementation of discipline programs" (7). Thus the first step to an effective discipline policy is clarifying the differing beliefs; I hope this study helps with this first step. While I am not looking for information about teachers discipline beliefs, behavior standard beliefs are closely connected to what discipline, or intervention action, can help achieve that behavior standard.

As far as finding solutions to hallway misconduct and other forms of misbehavior, Short, Short, and Blanton recommend that teachers beliefs shape the policy:

> At the school level, the match between discipline philosophy and strategy may be crucial (Short & Short, 1985b). In fact, discipline models or strategies that are congruent with teachers' beliefs may be more widely used and effectively carried out than are counterbelief strategies. Also, teachers and administrators with whom we have worked are more committed to the successful implementation of interventions that are compatible with their beliefs. On the other hand, counterbelief strategies may result in increased conflict, a lower level of implementation, and decreased involvement in organizational efforts" (7).

A solution would involve a policy that closely matches teacher's beliefs about discipline, because this type of policy is one that teachers will stand behind. As they note later on, this does suggest that a consensus is necessary: "The crucial key to an effective total school discipline program is shared values among students, teachers, parents, and administrators about what is acceptable, appropriate behavior in the particular school setting" (13). While this does not mean that all teachers should have the same beliefs about student behavior, it does suggest that teachers should agree on what discipline standards are necessary for the given situation. Short, Short and Blanton are explicit in stating that teachers be involved in planning the policy: "We firmly believe that teacher participation in planning and implementation of the plan is mandatory" (13).

## Methods

The sample for my study is a group of sixty-two teachers and administrators at a city middle school. Staff members range in age from mid-twenties to their sixties and are two thirds white and one third African-American. The middle school has 641 students with an equal number of black and white students.

I passed the survey out to all teachers and administrators at two faculty meetings. At one, I gave a brief introduction to my project and passed out surveys. I made a short announcement about my research project and asked people to stay five or ten minutes after the meeting and complete the survey. Many people in attendance completed the survey there. Others took the survey home with them, and I asked them to put it in the box of the teacher with whom I had done my student teaching that fall.

Later that week, I put surveys and a short letter in the mailboxes of teachers who I knew missed the faculty meeting, and asked these teachers to place the surveys in my teacher's mailbox. At the second faculty meeting, I had the curriculum coordinator ask if anyone needed a survey and made a general reminder to return surveys soon. I received twenty-four surveys out of about fifty that were distributed.

The first question in the survey asked teachers to state how long they had been teaching. If a teacher said they had taught for four years, I considered them a beginning teachers. If a teacher had taught for five to ten years, I considered them an experienced teacher. If a teacher had taught for ten years or more, I considered them a veteran teacher. This categorization helped me group teachers so I could determine if beginning teachers intervened less than veteran teachers.

I chose seven behaviors as common infractions: name-calling, pushing, cursing, fighting, play-fighting, running, and verbal threats. These were the ones I saw and heard most while I was at Old Dominion. The second part of the survey form was a chart asking teachers to check if they intervened in each of the seven behaviors always, sometimes, or never (see sample one). This part would determine how often each teacher intervened. I assigned each of their answers a value. If a teacher never intervened, they had zero. If they sometimes intervened, they had one point. If they always intervened, they had two points. I added up all seven numbers, then divided that by fourteen, the highest number of points possible. From this I came up with a percentage for each teacher. I checked to see which group, beginning, experienced, or veteran, intervened more. I also looked at the percentage of intervention for each of the seven behaviors to see if there were differences such as one group intervening more in one of the behaviors.



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Another one of my goals was to determine what factors contribute to a low frequency of intervention. Three short answer questions asked teachers to explain what behaviors always require intervention, which behaviors they ignore, and what contributes to why they sometimes do and sometimes don't intervene when they see unacceptable behaviors. I grouped the answers in categories like "too busy," "don't know kids," and "safety." I also went through all of the surveys and checked the answers by group to see if any of the three groups were more likely to name a certain factor.

## Results and Analysis

After getting a percentage of intervention for each teacher, results indicated that teachers do not always stop misbehavior (see chart one). Only one teacher indicated that they always intervened when they saw any of the seven targeted behaviors, and this may even be considered an outlier. What teacher can intervene in every single misbehavior that they see? Only one teacher indicated that they intervened less than fifty percent of the time. Most teachers fell between sixty and eight percent, meaning that almost all teachers intervene most of the time.

In looking for a correlation between teacher experience and frequency of teacher intervention, results show that beginning teachers intervened only slightly less than veteran teachers (see graph one).

Beginning teachers as a group intervene on average 63% of the time, and veteran teachers as a group intervene 77% of the time. Experienced teachers intervened at almost the exact same rate as beginning teachers, with a figure of 64%. Interestingly, the teacher with the lowest amount of intervention was an experienced teacher. Experienced and veteran teachers each had one teacher who said they intervened fifty percent of the time, which was the next lowest percentage, and two beginning teachers said they intervened fifty percent of the time.

Graph one also shows that as a group, beginning teachers are more consistent. Beginning teachers have a range of twenty-two points, experienced teachers a range of thirty six points (from 43% to 79%), and veteran teachers a range of thirty two percent *without* the teacher who reported that they intervened 100% of the time. With this teacher's response, veteran teachers have a range of fifty percent!

Data also showed that the three groups of teachers vary on what behaviors they consider to require intervention the most often, although there is agreement in some areas (see chart two and graph two). Teachers agree on how often to stop pushing, fighting, and play-fighting, but there is less consensus regarding name-calling, cursing, running, and verbal threats. There is the most consensus on fighting as a behavior requiring intervention; veteran and experienced teachers both step in 88% of the time, and beginning teachers step in 75% of the time. Experienced teachers stop play-fighting the most at 81%, with beginning teachers following closely at 75%. Veteran teachers intervene only slightly less often at 75%.

With name-calling and running, beginning and experienced teachers intervene less frequently and veteran teachers intervene more often. Beginning and experienced



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teachers agree that they intervene to stop these behaviors fifty percent of the time. Veteran teachers, however, intervene markedly more often. Veteran teachers intervene in name-calling 85% of the time, and running 71% of the time.

The consensus regarding the need for intervention in cases of verbal threats and cursing follows a slightly different pattern. For both of the behaviors, veteran teachers intervened the most. With cursing, veteran and experienced teachers intervened at 75% and 69% of the time, but beginning teachers intervened at 50%. With verbal threats, veteran and beginning teachers intervened at 79% and 75%, but experienced teachers intervened at 50%.

Teachers also answered three short answer questions. The question, "If you sometimes intervene and sometimes don't, why the difference?" asked teachers to explain the factors that decide whether they do or do not intervene in certain behaviors. The main reasons were a) the teachers were too busy with their own students, b) the teachers did not know the students involved, and c) the teachers did not find the misbehavior sufficiently threatening to warrant intervention. Other reasons included wanting students to learn to take care of their own problems, frustration with standards not being enforced schoolwide, and the fact that some misbehavior is typical adolescent acting out.

There were ten comments from teachers about being too busy with their own students. In response to the questions about why they sometimes did not intervene, two teachers answered, "Too busy." Part of this distraction is the classroom full of students that a teacher has waiting for them while they watch the hallways. Five teachers said they don't intervene because they have their own students to deal with. "When I have my

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own disruptive students, it hardly seems worth my time," says one teacher (B2)[1]. Another teacher agrees: "Sometimes there is too much going on in my classroom for me to leave my kids" (V18). When teachers have discipline to keep in the classroom, the hallway becomes second priority: "When my classroom is unsettled, it is harder to get out there" (E6). These comments indicate that teachers, when busy, choose to attend to their own class instead of intervening in hallway misbehavior.

Teacher comments also indicate that when teachers do not know the student who is misbehaving, they are less likely to intervene. Nine teachers said that not knowing a student often dissuaded them from intervening. One veteran teacher said, "I intervene routinely when I know the kids' names. If I don't know kids names I probably only intervene for fighting. If I don't know names, I know I have very little control. Occasionally, if I have time, I will track the child to his or her classroom, find out the name, and proceed" (V18). A beginning teacher agreed that not knowing a child's name makes it hard to effectively intervene: "For example, a student will come running by the classroom and the teacher yells "Please slow down!" He says, "No!" and the teacher asks "What's your name?" and the student will run off before the teacher can stop him. If the teacher really wants to follow through, he/she actually will have to <u>follow</u> that student to class to get his name" (B2). An experienced teacher says she sometimes does not intervene because of "having had bad experiences with students in hallways- not listening or becoming rude when I do not know who they are and they run off" (E12). In

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[1] B, E, and V refer the categories veteran, experienced, and beginning; the number refers to the order the teacher falls in when teachers are ranked numerically in order of experience.

a large middle school, not knowing a student's name makes it harder to hold students accountable.

Knowing the child's personality also makes a teacher feel more comfortable intervening. One experienced teacher says, "When I have a connection to one or both of the students, it is a lot easier" (E6). Another experienced teacher finds that she expects a lot of her students: "I also tend to intervene when one of my students is involved, either as an aggressor or as victim- I find that I hold my own students to a higher standard than the school itself does" (E8). One experienced teacher says, "I usually don't intervene with the ACE kids and some of the sp. ed. kids, unless I have already developed a 'comfort zone' with them" (V19).[2] Another teacher says, "If the student looks threatening, sometimes I don't think it's worth getting involved (unless, of course, it is very serious.) in my opinion, this is a large male- even though that's a definite stereotype" (N2). One experienced teacher finds it easier to judge whether or not intervention is the best option: "If I am familiar with the students, and know that things may not erupt because of their personality. It's easier to identify what is playful and what is serious if you know the student" (E9). Teachers indicate that they are more confident intervening when they know the students involved.

Teachers overwhelmingly agree that they are less likely to intervene when the misbehavior does not seem to serious. In the short answer questions, ten teachers named the seriousness of the situation as why they sometimes intervene and sometimes do not. Teachers said they don't intervene if the misbehavior "doesn't appear serious enough to

[2] The ACE program is a program for students who cannot function in the regular classroom because of behavior problems.



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get involved" (B2). Teachers said they intervene "if it looks like someone is going to get hurt" (B2), "if someone is physically threatened" (E5), and "when... a physical altercation is imminent" (E6). "I intervene when I feel another student is being threatened or intimidated in any way," stated one beginning teacher (B4). Another teacher said they would intervene if the situation was potentially violent: "I "would always intervene in a 'high-risk' situation, may not intervene if I feel the situation will take care of itself." (M11) An experienced teacher explained their philosophy: "I tend to intervene when one student is being threatened or hurt by another, but not when two students appear both to be involved voluntarily" (E8).

Related to distinguishing between serious and playful behavior is that teachers realize that some acting out is natural for adolescents. Five teachers said they do not intervene because some misbehavior is typical. One teacher says they do not intervene because some behavior is "'typical' middle school behavior (name-calling)" (E11). "Some behavior is just youngsters playing and a part of growing up," said the most experienced teacher (V24). Another veteran teacher shares the philosophy: "Kids are just venting and no one hears them. They "name-call" after they walk by. The kid is already so angry I just intervene with a smile and a "how are you?" (V19).

Since acting out is common in adolescents, when deciding whether or not to intervene, teachers try to distinguish between "normal" misbehavior and disruptive misbehavior. A veteran teacher says she intervenes in "rude, abusive or dangerous behavior; try to distinguish from typical, obnoxious adolescent behavior" (V21). One teacher thinks that knowing students can help: "It's easier to identify what is playful and what is serious if you know the student" ( E9 ). A veteran teacher concurs: "If kids are


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play pushing, the manner and tone help me decide to intervene" (V16). Another veteran teacher trusts her instincts: "A feeling about the situation… is the student cursing while socializing, or cursing to intimidate someone?" (V22). There is obviously a fine line that these veteran and experienced teachers are talking about.

Teachers seem to have their own systems for deciding what actions require intervention, but many teachers are not happy with this inconsistency. Five teachers said they sometimes do not intervene because policies are not schoolwide. One veteran teacher says he/she "gets tired of being the one who always intervenes" (V14). Another teacher says, "Some typical, obnoxious, adolescent behavior is so pervasive that I feel burned out with intervening and seeing no overall change" (V21). An experienced teacher shares the frustration: "It's not enforced schoolwide, and I can't go it alone." (E7) Another veteran teacher says he/she sometimes does not intervene because "the consequences- or lack of- aren't worth my time and effort" (V22). A teacher notes the problems that inconsistency causes: "If rules are not consistently upheld by all, my choice is to get rid of the rule (ex: chewing gum)- inconsistency just leads to the kids spending all their time and energy manipulating" (V21). Teachers agree that inconsistency causes frustration when there is not a school wide policy on discipline.

Four teachers said that they do not intervene because they want students to take learn to take care of their own problems. "Sometimes students need to work things out themselves," said one experienced teacher (E10). Another agreed that intervening was not always the thing to do: "Sometimes I want students to learn to deal with their problems… if I feel that the students can handle the situation" (B4). Some teachers



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appeared to not want to be the all-encompassing disciplinarian, feeling that students need the experience of working out conflicts themselves.

Two teachers named personal safety as a reason not to intervene. One veteran said he/she does not intervene "when it puts [her] at risk" (V15). Another veteran says he/she sometimes does not intervene in fighting because of "safety and the threat of being harmed- sometimes it isn't safe to touch students" (V24).

Only one teacher named administrative problems as a reason not to intervene. One teacher said he/she was "Too exhausted to fight the fight which follows intervention- I'm not a fighter by nature." (B1) This teacher indicates that if their intervention causes paperwork or more effort afterward, intervention is more trouble than it is worth. Also, only one teacher said the administration was not supportive of teachers' attempts to discipline students for non-classroom misbehavior.

In addition to distinguishing between normal and malicious adolescent behavior, teachers make other choices as well: "Sometimes I have to choose between behaviors and the lesser of the two evils gets overlooked." (V20) One teacher explains his philosophy: "It's important to focus on what the end result of your intervention should be. You want kids quiet and on their way to their classes. If you can accomplish this with the minimum level of intervention (especially non-confrontational), this is the desired result" (E6). One teacher summed up several main points in his/her response: "The seriousness of the situation, how well I know the students involved, how busy I am at the time, what kind of mood I'm in." (E10) This teacher notes that many factors that go into whether or not a teacher decides to intervene.

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Teachers agree on the seriousness of the situation in the hallways. One teacher had a strong opinion about the hallways at the middle school: "the general public would not tolerate what we see" (V22). One teacher reports from a student's eye view: "my daughter went to Old Dominion- the hallways were her biggest nightmare" (V19). Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the current standard and expressed desire for more consistency. One teacher said, "We need to have a climate where people treat one another with more respect" (V17). Another agreed: "I don't want to condone [the misbehavior] by not addressing" (E7). Teachers themselves recommended consistency and perseverance: "If kids know you will enforce good behavior they will behave. It takes time and consistency but is worth it." (V20) Another reminisced and recommended teamwork: "I've been here long enough to remember when halls were hideous… when teachers stayed in the classroom and left 'patrols' to a few of us… our efforts made a difference- imagine if it were really a team effort!" (E13) As I noted earlier, teachers didn't indict the administration. One teacher said, "At Rappahannock Elementary the faculty was told if they were injured breaking up a fight or if a student complained about the way a teacher pulled a kid out of a fight, the administration would not support them- I do not feel that way here!" (V19)

All groups of teachers named three main reasons for not intervening: a) the teachers were too busy with their own students, b) the teachers did not know the students involved, and c) the teachers did not find the misbehavior sufficiently threatening to warrant intervention. The only other reason that all groups cited was that they wanted students to be able to take care of their own problems.

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There were a few areas in which teachers differed by experience. Veteran and experienced teacher mentioned that they were frustrated that standards were not enforced schoolwide. Beginning teachers did not cite this frustration. Veteran and experienced teachers were also the only ones who mentioned that some behavior is typical middle school behavior.

## Conclusion

Beginning teachers do report that they intervene less than veteran teachers. So, perhaps they are less confident and less authoritative. However, it is also possible that beginning teachers are rating themselves more harshly- or more accurately. The 50-50-85 statistic for beginning, experienced, and veteran teachers (see chart two) for intervention in name-calling may suggest that veteran teachers are so used to the behavior that they don't even hear it, and therefore think they intervene more often than they do.

Another research finding that supports this possibility is that that four veteran teachers and one experienced teacher said that some misbehavior is simply typical of middle schoolers. No beginning teachers said this. It could be that veteran teachers are more in tune with the middle school ethos, but it could also be that veterans have been around middle schoolers for so long that the misbehavior seems normal and they are willing to excuse it.

Teachers at Old Dominion have many similar ideas about hallway misbehavior. For instance, safety comes first, and a teacher cannot intervene in every misbehavior. However, which behaviors are the least serious? Obviously fighting is dangerous and

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should be stopped, but what about muttered curses and name-calling? It is easy to see hitting and pushing, and harder to hear and judge the seriousness of name-calling and verbal threats. Teachers must make judgement calls: how serious is the name? Does the other student appear frightened by the verbal threat?

Teachers need to agree on a common standard. Much of teaching involves subjective snap judgements, but there comes a time when teachers need to know what their colleagues think. Teachers need to know where the school as a whole stands on these less clear-cut issues. Not only do students see the different expectations that "enable" them to misbehave, teachers get frustrated when policies are not upheld by all. Recall Short, Short and Blanton's comment about differing discipline beliefs: "Without awareness and accommodation of these belief differences, discipline planners risk ineffective or incomplete implementation of discipline programs" (7). Many teachers in the survey expressed concern that the hallway corrections they made were ineffective because teachers did not have a consistent standard.

I recommend that teachers meet to discuss what hallway behavior is acceptable. Teachers at Old Dominion know they hallway is a problem, and they seem ready to work on it. They are invested in the situation; their frustration and concern prove this. The teachers in the survey expressed a desire for consistency and improvement in the hallway discipline policy. The teachers do not blame the administration for the problem. They see it as their duty, not like in New York City where the teachers prefer to hand the hallways over to armed guard. The teachers seem open to finding solutions, and know that they are the front line.

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The situation as it is now is not conducive to school-wide discipline. First of all, there are some of the attitudes that *Rethinking School Discipline* lists as preventive of school-wide discipline. Several teachers sometimes had the "He's Not My Student" attitude that keeps them from intervening because they don't know the students and feel they cannot effectively intervene. Second, it seems likely that teachers are not aware of each other's differing beliefs. Teachers who are in the same corner of the school may know that neighboring teachers intervene whenever they hear cursing, but probably do not know the standards held by other teachers in other grades and/or areas of the school. When students move from one area of the school to another during the day, the differing standards become problematic, because students realize there is not one behavior standard.

The first thing necessary is to clarify beliefs, which I hope my survey has helped to do. From here, teachers can see how their beliefs differ, and debate how the beliefs should shape policy. Short, Short, and Blanton are adamant that teachers beliefs shape policy, because "counterbelief strategies may result in increased conflict, a lower level of implementation, and decreased involvement in organizational efforts" (7). Before knowing what discipline policy should be, teachers and administrators must meet to make sure they know what the general shared beliefs are.

Thus, only after clarifying beliefs can teachers can look for solutions. In the survey, teachers pointed out three main reasons why they do not intervene consistently in the hallway. First, teachers are busy! Between classes they have their own classroom of students coming and going, and they may need to talk to a student or give a student missed work. Teachers may decide to have a rotating hall monitor duty, or decide that no



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matter how busy they are, they will go out into the hall. This may include being more firm with his or her own class, and setting the expectation that they come in quietly to class because the teacher must still be watching the hall.

Second, in a school with 641 students, a teacher cannot expect to know all the faces. Breaking into teams helps, but a teacher sees more than her own 80 students in the hallways. Eighth grade teachers are at an even bigger disadvantage, because they don't have those familiar faces from the year before like the seventh grade teachers do. If teachers agree that knowing more faces would help the hall situation, they may want to plan more cross grade activities.

Third, teachers do not want to pounce on every misbehavior; they make the choice to address serious misbehavior, and let "typical" adolescent name-calling and cursing go. These teachers know that adolescence is a tumultuous time when kids need to socialize; still, teachers could get together and decide within what boundaries they want this to happen. Should cursing be allowed sometimes, or not at all? It is important to note that teachers might disagree on this; however, by acknowledging disagreement, teachers may be more likely to find a compromise. For example, a curse word that a teacher overhears in a serious, private, non-threatening conversation might be overlooked if no other students have heard it. But a curse word that is shouted loudly, or one that is used threateningly, might not be acceptable.

Short, Short and Blanton say, "The crucial key to an effective total school discipline program is shared values among students, teachers. parents, and administrators about what is acceptable, appropriate behavior in the particular school setting" (13). Teachers will never all have identical beliefs, but they can agree on standard that



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accommodate many of their beliefs. The teachers in the survey agreed when they noted that inconsistent standards were causing frustration. It seems the time is ripe for administrators and teachers to meet. From here, teacher beliefs should shape policy through "teacher participation in planning and implementation of the policy" (13). It sounds like a project, but one that the teachers in the survey find important enough to try to take on.

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# Appendix

Chart One:

| Teacher | years taught | points | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 7 | 50% |
| 2 | 1 | 7 | 50% |
| 3 | 2 | 10 | 71% |
| 4 | 4 | 9.5 | 68% |
| 5 | 6 | 11 | 79% |
| 6 | 6 | 9 | 64% |
| 7 | 6 | 9 | 64% |
| 8 | 8 | 6 | 43% |
| 9 | 9 | 10 | 71% |
| 10 | 9 | 11 | 79% |
| 11 | 10 | 9 | 64% |
| 12 | 10 | 7 | 50% |
| 13 | 12 | 10 | 71% |
| 14 | 18 | 14 | 100% |
| 15 | 20 | 7 | 50% |
| 16 | 20 | 11 | 79% |
| 17 | 21 | 12 | 86% |
| 18 | 22 | 8 | 57% |
| 19 | 23 | 12 | 86% |
| 20 | 23 | 9 | 64% |
| 21 | 23 | 10 | 71% |
| 22 | 27 | 9 | 64% |
| 23 | 30 | 10 | 71% |
| 24 | 30 | 11 | 79% |

Graph one

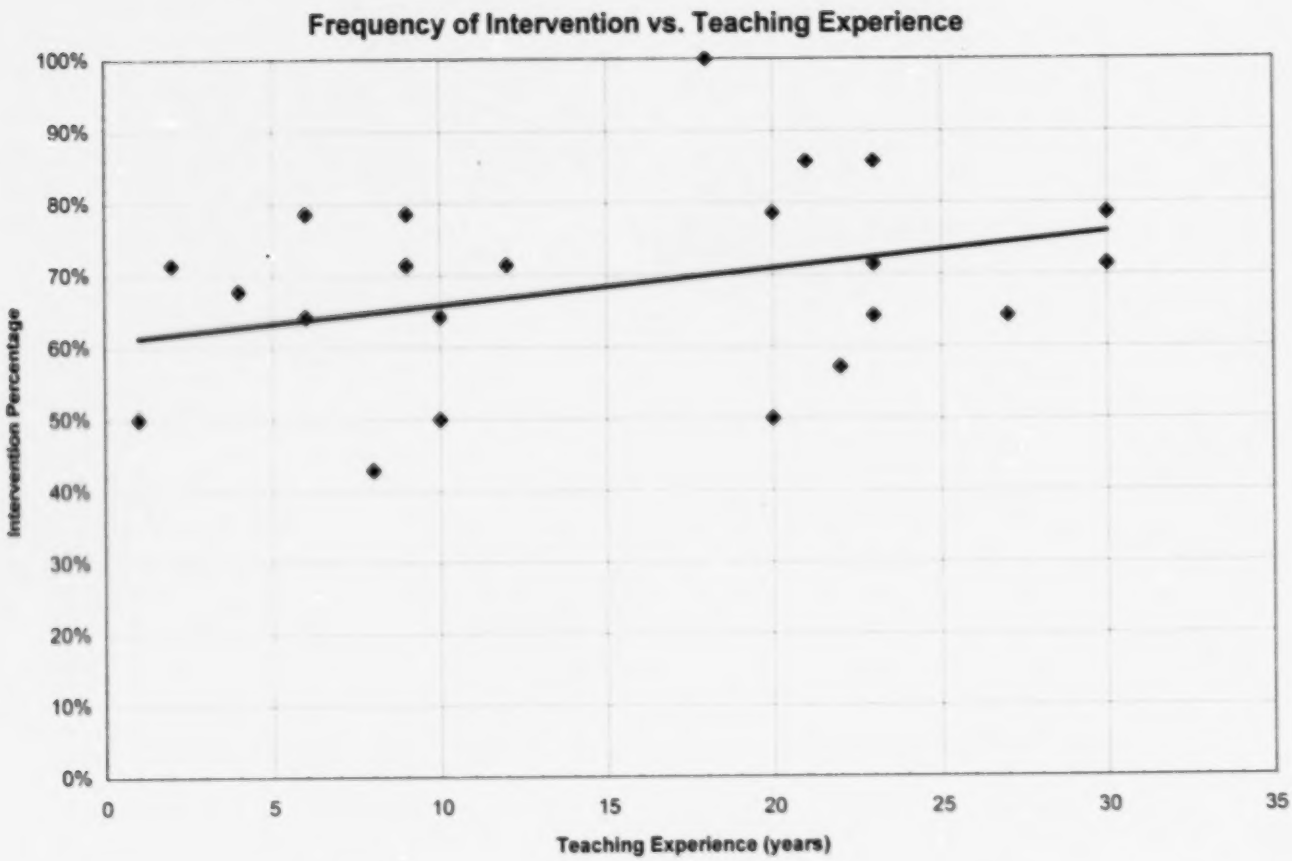
Frequency of Intervention vs. Teaching Experience
Intervention Percentage
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
Teaching Experience (years)

**Chart Two:**

| group of teachers | Name-calling | Pushing | cursing | Fighting | play-fighting | running | verbal threat |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beginning (1-4) | 50% | 63% | 50% | 75% | 75% | 50% | 75% |
| Experienced (5-10) | 50% | 63% | 69% | 88% | 81% | 50% | 50% |
| Veteran (10 or more) | 85% | 71% | 75% | 88% | 71% | 71% | 79% |

Graph Two: